United Nations A/63/262

General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 August 2008
English
Original: English/French

Sixty-third session
Item 48 of the provisional agenda*
Culture of peace

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report highlights the activities carried out by key United Nations entities involved in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/90. It provides information on the observance of the International Day of Non-violence and the International Day of Peace, and an overview of other regional and global initiatives taken in the fields of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. It should be read in conjunction with the annual progress report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 (A/63/127).

* A/63/150.

08-45641 (E) 030908 120908

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 62/90, the General Assembly affirmed that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace. The Assembly also emphasized the need to sustain the momentum generated by its High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, held on 4 and 5 October 2007. In the same resolution, the Assembly decided to declare 2010 the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and recommended that, during the course of the year, appropriate events be organized, inter alia, a high-level dialogue and/or informal interactive hearings with civil society. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 9 of the same resolution, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-third session on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The report should be read in conjunction with the annual progress report (A/63/127) prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), submitted in accordance with Assembly resolution 62/89. That comprehensive report presents the activities carried out by the United Nations system to promote and implement the Programme of Action on a culture of peace adopted by the General Assembly in September 1999.

3. For the sake of concision, the present document focuses on activities carried out by the United Nations actors that have played a direct role in the field under review, although with different focus and mandate, namely UNESCO, the Alliance of Civilizations, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of Public Information and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Other United Nations entities may have developed working relationships with cultural or faith-based organizations that have also contributed directly or indirectly to the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

4. Information is provided in section V of the present report on the observance of the United Nations Day of Non-Violence and the International Day of Peace, in response to the request of the Assembly in its resolution 61/271.

II. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

5. UNESCO has carried out a high number of activities of direct relevance to General Assembly resolution 62/90, some of a cultural nature and others focused on the religious dimension of international dialogue.

A. Activities for the promotion of intercultural dialogue

6. In 2007, the General Conference adopted the medium-term strategy (2008-2013), which is structured around five overarching objectives, one of which is fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace. That

objective seeks to present the UNESCO comparative advantage in the promotion of cultural diversity and its corollary, dialogue among civilizations and cultures.

7. As intersectoral work holds particular promise for UNESCO in the context of the United Nations reform, the Organization will implement, during the biennium 2008-2009, 12 intersectoral platforms that focus on key challenges that require an interdisciplinary approach. One of the platforms, "Contributing to the dialogue among civilizations and cultures and a culture of peace", defines four objectives: the exploitation of the general and regional histories; the development of intercultural skills; engaging new voices in interfaith dialogue and in other spiritual traditions; and the media in favour of fostering dialogue and mutual understanding.

8. This intersectoral platform will seek, among other things, to foster the development of educational and pedagogical means aimed specifically at promoting, in particular among youth, knowledge of and respect for the diversity of beliefs, highlighting, when possible, the cross-cultural borrowings that have occurred throughout the ages between spiritual traditions in multicultural and pluri-religious societies.

9. More specifically, a series of activities has been launched to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges posed by the interaction between cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue on the one hand, and the strengthening of efforts to combat cultural, ethnic and religious prejudices, on the other. In the first six months, efforts have been made both to continue long-standing programmes and to launch new projects. During this biennium there is continuing emphasis on two types of approach, one with a thematic focus and the other with a geographical focus.

10. The efforts made with a thematic approach include regular progress with the project on general and regional histories and their use, particularly African history, for teaching purposes. In the same vein, considerable progress has been made with the Slave Route Project. Support has also been provided for the project to preserve the African liberation heritage (Independence in Africa: the African Liberation Heritage Programme): a consultative meeting was organized, in collaboration with the Government of Namibia, to discuss the modalities for implementation of the project in the countries concerned (Windhoek, February 2008). UNESCO continues to be actively involved in indigenous issues (i.e. attending the session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, held in New York in April 2008 and hosting the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, held in Paris from 15 to 17 September 2008). The organization contributes to the extent possible to the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force by giving greater support to intercultural and interreligious dialogue, recognized as an important element to counter extremism. Other projects include the elaboration of databases on good practices concerning innovative means of designing and conducting intercultural and interreligious dialogue; further expanding of the Power of Peace Network (utilization of the new media tools to connect people of the world to enhance mutual understanding and tolerance through discussions on issues of pluralism), the Initiative B@bel (promotion of universal access to multilingual information in cyberspace); and the SESAME project (involving scientists from the Arab region working together with Israeli scientists).

11. With this same thematic approach, several publications have been issued (including a teaching orientation guide for secondary schoolteachers on awareness-

raising for intercultural dialogue, UNESCO Office Beirut and Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, 2008). For the purposes of capacity-building for decision makers and stakeholders in civil society, UNESCO co-organized, with the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Islamic Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ISESCO), the Baku Forum in June 2008 in order to expand the role of women in intercultural dialogue. The organization also supported the creation of a website entitled "No Ghetto", hosted by young people to raise awareness of the principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

12. The regional and international project "Arabia Plan" is one of the geographically focused approaches that has been continued. The main events were a meeting and a concert (May 2008), organized in close collaboration with the Delegation of Argentina and the Arabia Plan consultative committee, to demonstrate how Arab music and Latin American music are related, including through the influence of the Iberian peninsula. UNESCO is also continuing implementation of its project on "The Image of the Other in Arabo-Islamic and European Textbooks". Lastly, the sixth regional Summit of Heads of State of South-East Europe took place in Athens in June 2008 on the subject of Intercultural Encounters on Maritime, River and Lake Routes in South-East Europe. These "roads of dialogue" offer a new opportunity to reinterpret history in an intercultural way in order to reach a shared understanding. The main objective of these Summits is to support the crucial role of culture in strengthening mutual confidence and understanding in the region.

13. The UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia will take place in Gwanju, Republic of Korea, from 24 to 26 July 2008. The Director-General will participate in this event during his visit to Korea.

14. Collaboration with the Alliance of Civilizations has been reinforced through the signature of a memorandum of understanding on the occasion of the first Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, held in Madrid in January 2008. The memorandum describes four specific areas for the development of joint projects and activities: (a) developing educational, cultural and scientific contents that foster dialogue and mutual understanding; (b) intensifying intercultural exchanges among youth; (c) highlighting the role of the media in fostering dialogue and mutual understanding; and (d) establishing new multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to reach out to new audiences.

15. For an initial two-year period, the agreement covers activities that bring together all levels of government, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. It provides for the development of educational, cultural and scientific contents to support dialogue and mutual appreciation, for example by revising school textbooks, producing teaching materials and disseminating the principles underpinning intercultural education, in particular on the basis of the UNESCO series of general and regional histories as well as the "roads of dialogue" programme; the strengthening of interactions among young people in order to overcome cultural barriers, for example by setting up discussion forums, in particular on the Internet, for a better decoding and appreciation of the cultural, scientific and educational content currently available; promotion of the mass media as vehicles for tolerance, for example by supporting co-production and exchange programmes for media professionals of different cultural and religious backgrounds; and establishing new multi-partnerships to help promote multilingualism, to identify and bring together students, researchers and scientists from a variety of cultural

backgrounds and also religious leaders and other influential opinion makers in order to promote mutual respect.

16. Cooperation with the Alliance of Civilizations has also been strengthened by regular exchanges between the two secretariats in relation to the Alliance's priority projects on interfaith dialogue and media literacy. In this connection, UNESCO has taken part in the non-governmental organization forum on the Alliance of Civilizations, organized in the context of the 179th session of the Executive Board; the regional seminar "Women and the Alliance of Civilizations: Opportunities and Challenges" (Buenos Aires, 28-29 April 2008); and the meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations (New York, 10 June 2008).

B. Activities focused more specifically on the promotion of interreligious dialogue

17. UNESCO has always emphasized knowledge of religion as a means of understanding social and human realities. Taking into account that "beliefs" and "value systems" are intrinsic parts of each culture, understood as "ways of living together", the organization defends the view that all faiths convey a message of peace, justice and human solidarity. Thus, all religious and spiritual leaders, like other humanistic civil society movements, have the potential to exercise a moral and positive influence on how people in society understand each other and interact. Dialogue among individuals and groups belonging to different religious or spiritual traditions is therefore an increasingly significant challenge of our times.

18. The UNESCO programme on interreligious dialogue, which forms an important component of intercultural dialogue, is precisely aimed at promoting dialogue between individuals and leaders of different religions, faiths and convictions, with a view to increasing mutual knowledge about spiritual traditions and their underlying values, thus enhancing understanding among and between societies.

19. In line with its programme "Routes of dialogue", the organization has in recent years brought together, on a regular basis, eminent religious figures from the monotheistic faiths and from different spiritual and humanistic traditions, in thematic meetings, in order to analyse a shared understanding of complex issues relating to interfaith dialogue.

20. While international and regional conferences have proven worthwhile and even essential to understanding religion in many geostrategic contexts, the joint reflection entailed is of itself insufficient. The declarations, proposals and final documents adopted at meetings convened by UNESCO have highlighted the need to promote the educational and pedagogical aspects of interreligious dialogue and the necessity to develop conceptual and operational frameworks.

21. Building on the experience gained in these high-level political and intellectual encounters, the objectives set out by UNESCO for the biennium 2008-2009 are to produce and disseminate pertinent guidelines and publications to mainstream their main principles into local, national and regional policies; to raise awareness among educators and civil society representatives about the role and value of interreligious dialogue at the school level; and to elaborate and make available, nationally and regionally, databases on good practices through the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs

Network on Inter-religious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding, which is being further strengthened.

22. In this context, particular attention is being paid to the development and implementation of joint projects and activities in the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed by UNESCO and other intergovernmental organizations such as ISESCO, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Alliance of Civilizations.

23. Programme activities include the development of teaching tools, school manuals and specific educational programmes and the design of "training of trainers" programmes in close cooperation with concerned UNESCO Chairs and the Oslo Coalition for Peace; the production of a teaching manual in Arabic and French on the cultural aspects of Christianity and Islam in view of improving mutual knowledge and respect among youth, followed by a training workshop (scheduled to be held in Beirut) for teachers of the ASPnet school on the use of the manual; the organization of a national interreligious dialogue in Mongolia to reduce religious prejudices and thus ensure harmonious coexistence of different faiths; a regional encounter (scheduled to take place in Teheran) of religious leaders to facilitate interfaith dialogue and promote peace in the region; a regional workshop in Dakar to share good practices on the role of traditional spiritualities; national workshops (scheduled in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia) with faith-based NGOs to highlight the role of women in interreligious dialogue; an expert meeting (scheduled in Brasilia) aimed at elaborating recommendations for public policies to eradicate religious prejudices and marginalization of traditional beliefs.

24. In specific multicultural environments, the need to develop rational, unprejudiced and respectful approaches to religious diversity has increased. In response to this need, multiple experiments, practices and learning spaces have been launched within culturally diverse communities throughout the world. UNESCO intends to undertake research on, and identify, such experiences through the community of practices network of UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Network on Inter-religious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding, which ensures knowledge and information exchanges between universities and other relevant UNESCO partners. Enhanced understanding of these practices will provide the basis for the design and production of pedagogical material, awareness-raising activities and training of trainers for journalists, decision makers, teachers, etc.

25. Priority has therefore been given to teaching young people about religion and interreligious dialogue in order to make them aware of the value of respect for the other, which is more vital than ever to ensure harmonious coexistence in contemporary pluralistic societies. Such education rests on two features: on the one hand, mutual knowledge through a comparative and multidisciplinary introduction to the fundamental concepts of religions and spiritual traditions; and, on the other hand, examples of their past and present-day interactions and mutual influences, both of which will obviously vary according to the education systems of each country.

26. UNESCO has also been actively participating in the meetings of the Troika of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace at United Nations Headquarters, and is following their discussions on the upcoming International Year

for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010, for which UNESCO has been designated as lead agency.

27. Finally, the misrepresentation of religion as the root cause of intercultural conflict can be further researched and understood through intercultural dialogue on issues of universal concern such as the environment, social welfare, employment, gender and poverty. Such issues already figure highly on the agendas of different spiritual and religious visions and understandings of the world. They cut across religious and other borders. Dialogue is also under way among civil society groups and NGOs with diverse religious affiliations. Activities to be developed in the longer term include building partnerships with civil society agents engaged in such dialogue, supporting meetings and seminars that bring together religious and other relevant groups, exchanges, publication and online dissemination of new approaches to religious diversity, the design of pedagogical material, awareness-raising campaigns among civil society groups and policymakers and within other relevant learning spaces.

III. Alliance of Civilizations

28. The Alliance of Civilizations was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. It aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among States and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.

29. Following a report produced by 20 eminent personalities, exploring the roots of polarization between cultures and societies worldwide and proposing practical recommendations to address this growing trend, in April 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance. This marked the beginning of the second phase of the Alliance, with the development of an action-oriented implementation plan focusing on initiatives and projects in the areas of youth, media, education and migration.

30. As was first noted at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, the focus of the Alliance on concrete initiatives was reinforced and consolidated at the first Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, which was hosted by the Government of Spain on 15 and 16 January 2008. The Forum was a high-profile, action-oriented event that brought together a powerful network of Heads of State, political leaders, Governments, international organizations, civil society groups, religious communities, and media and corporate leaders.

Expansion of political support and Group of Friends: from 44 countries and multilaterals to 88

31. Since April 2007, the Group of Friends community has grown markedly from 44 members, when the High Representative was appointed to 88 members at present. The geographical breadth of the membership of the Group is wide and, in many cases, their engagement with the Alliance is deepening as is reflected by attendance at Group of Friends meetings, the participation in the first Forum of the Alliance in Madrid at senior levels, and invitations for Alliance participation or

requests for the granting of Alliance auspices for conferences and events organized by individual Group of Friends members.

Establishment of national strategies to advance the Alliance

32. The High Representative has urged member States of the Group of Friends to prepare national strategies for cross-cultural dialogue that cover the four main fields of the Alliance (education, media, youth and migration). Four countries — Spain, Turkey, Bulgaria and New Zealand — have already adopted their strategies to advance the objectives of the Alliance within their own borders. More are expected to follow suit in the coming year.

Partnership agreements with major agencies

33. The Alliance of Civilizations has concluded five partnership agreements with multilateral agencies and international organizations (UNESCO, the League of Arab States, ISESCO, ALECSO and United Cities and Local Governments), all of which focus on specific elements of the Alliance implementation plan. A letter of intent has been signed with the Council of Europe, confirming mutual will to prepare a bilateral memorandum of understanding to be signed in the near future. Other international organizations have also been approached in order to conclude memorandums of understanding with the Alliance.

Establishment of a network of Alliance of Civilizations Ambassadors

34. A criteria and a selection process for the appointment of Alliance of Civilizations Goodwill Ambassadors has been developed. The Ambassadors are intended to be a group of high-profile well-connected individuals who can extend the outreach, and raise the profile, of the Alliance, advocate for its objectives and projects, support fund-raising, and, upon request by the High Representative, speak on behalf of the initiative in select international forums and meetings.

Network of focal points of the Alliance

35. The High Representative called upon each member of the Group of Friends to appoint a focal point to serve as the national/principal coordinator of Alliance issues within a country or an organization and to serve as the main interlocutor to the Alliance. Twenty-four countries and nine international organizations have already appointed focal points for this purpose.

Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations online clearing house

36. In February 2008, the first theme of the Alliance of Civilizations Clearinghouse, focusing on media literacy education, was launched (see www.aocmedialiteracy.org). In addition to providing information on media literacy education programmes and policies, the website has become a virtual meeting place for media literacy education advocates and researchers and policymakers from every region of the world.

Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations rapid response media mechanism

37. In February 2008, the Alliance launched its rapid response media mechanism to support the work of media professionals by connecting them with leading experts

and analysts who can comment on intercultural issues, particularly in times of crisis. The mechanism works through outreach from the Alliance of Civilizations secretariat to leading media agencies and a web-based directory of experts and commentators (see www.globalexpertfinder.org) that is easily searchable by subject and region of expertise as well as language capacity.

38. The rapid response media mechanism was first mobilized after the release by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders of a film denigrating Islam and the Koran. Actions taken included an opinion piece co-signed by Muslim religious leaders from diverse regions; the dissemination of a list of 10 experts from diverse regions prepared to provide comment and analysis on the film to media outlets around the world; and consultations with influential civil society partners to reduce potential negative fallout.

Establishment of the Youth Solidarity Fund

39. The Alliance of Civilizations has launched the Youth Solidarity Fund to support youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between young people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The fund will provide seed funding in amounts of up to US$ 20,000 to outstanding youth-led projects in one or more of the following areas: intercultural and interreligious exchanges; youth leadership training; youth voices in the media.

Launch of two multimillion-dollar funds in the fields of youth employment (Silatech) and mass media for social change (Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund)

40. With an initial $100 million investment from Qatar and partnership agreements with both the World Bank and Cisco, Silatech aims to support youth enterprise and entrepreneurship, career counselling and job training, and to connect job supply with job demand, beginning with pilot programmes in the Arab world, where youth unemployment rates are among the highest in the world.

Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund

41. The Media Fund was established with an initial $10 million contribution from private business leaders and partnerships with leading Hollywood production, distribution, and talent agencies. The initial productions of the Media Fund will feature films and documentaries that address issues of cross-cultural relations. The Fund will also support research on the impact of visual media on cross-cultural relations, violence and self-perception of minority communities. Initial research has been commissioned and is under way through a joint venture of the Harvard School of Public Health and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

42. Looking ahead over the next 12 months, the Alliance looks forward to further development of existing initiatives such as the Clearinghouse, the rapid response media mechanism, the launch of the Youth Employment Initiative and new opportunities and projects. In the near term, the Alliance would like to prioritize city-to-city diplomacy efforts and encourage further development of national and regional strategies to advance the principles of the Alliance among members of the Group of Friends.

IV. United Nations Population Fund

43. UNFPA supports communities in bringing about change from within. This involves drawing on the positive cultural values and resources to promote and further reproductive rights. UNFPA collaborations and partnerships with a diverse array of civil society, including faith-based organizations, religious and tribal leaders, and indigenous peoples, have made a difference in creating local support for the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development worldwide. Activities carried out since the last session of the General Assembly and planned for the short term are presented below.

Regional forums of faith-based organizations

44. UNFPA is holding a series of regional forums focusing on enhancing partnerships and launching interfaith networks on population and development. To that end, the African regional faith-based organization forum and launch of the African interfaith network on population and development took place in Durban, South Africa, in December 2007. In attendance were 60 faith-based representatives from 18 countries. The Asian and Pacific regional faith-based organization forum and launch of Asian and Pacific interfaith network on population and development took place in Kuala Lumpur in May 2008. Sixty-eight faith-based representatives from 14 countries attended. The Arab States' regional faith-based organization forum, and subsequent launch of network will take place in July 2008, and will be followed by the Latin American and the Caribbean regional faith-based organization forum and interfaith network launch in September.

Global interfaith forum and network

45. The launching of a global interfaith network for population and development will take place at the global faith-based organization forum organized by UNFPA in Istanbul, in October 2008. That forum will be the culmination of the four previously held regional-level faith-based organization consultations, and will bring together over 200 existing and potential UNFPA partners from the faith-based world to discuss issues of population and development, and to seek ways of enhancing these partnerships in the future. The global faith-based organization forum will be the site for the launch of the global interfaith network on population and development. This network and its accompanying database of members will be another important resource for the United Nations in the development of strategic partnerships with faith-based organizations.

United Nations country team training on human rights-based and culturally sensitive approaches to programming

46. UNFPA has developed a tool known as the "culture lens", which enables the integration of its three programming approaches: gender equality, cultural sensitivity and human rights. The culture lens allows for the development of programmatic designs that fit diverse national and local contexts, without losing sight of the human rights that they are promoting. The culture lens is being used in United Nations country team culture sensitivity training, marking the first time that United Nations country teams are being trained together to link culture to development programming. To date, UNFPA has conducted United Nations country

team training for five United Nations country teams: Bangladesh, Brazil, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan.

Round tables and other events on cultural integration

47. In 2008, UNFPA continues to organize a series of such round tables on the following topics: "Tackling stigma in the Arab region: working with religious and media leaders in the AIDS response"; "The role of faith-based organizations in improving maternal, newborn and child health"; "Engaging South African faith-based organizations on HIV/AIDS and violence against women"; "The Women, Faith and Development Alliance: a process and a future"; and "Interfaith education for children and youth".

48. UNFPA supported the participation of several faith-based organizations from different regions to attend a Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) strategy meeting on fostering partnerships between United Nations agencies and faith-based organizations on HIV/AIDS and co-sponsored an interfaith prayer service at the United Nations high-level meeting on AIDS.

49. Collaboration is ongoing with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development on a joint study, assessing the relationship between religion, women's empowerment and gender equity, with a view to emerging with concrete recommendations for programming.

50. UNFPA is working on the development of socio-cultural indicators, to be used in programme design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, particularly in the UNFPA mandate areas of reproductive health, gender equality and population and development.

51. In July 2008, a United Nations inter-agency consultation on engagement with faith-based organizations was hosted by UNFPA, with the objective of sharing best practices, assessing lessons learned, and strategizing shared approaches in working with faith-based organizations in development.

52. UNFPA will launch in October a publication called *Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-based Organizations*, documenting the various areas of partnership and collaboration with religious leaders and faith-based development agencies around the world, the lessons learned and the policy recommendations.

53. Collaboration is ensured with UNICEF to establish a trust fund for the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting. The initiative aims to reduce the practice by 40 per cent in 17 countries by 2015, by using culturally sensitive approaches. The project has already been launched in the following eight countries: Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Senegal and the Sudan.

Reproductive rights and population welfare of indigenous peoples

54. UNFPA works in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Peru provide support, while initiating work on indigenous issues in countries such as Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. In the area of population, UNFPA supports the development of a national statistics commission for indigenous peoples in Ecuador, and the generation, analysis, use and dissemination of disaggregated data on indigenous peoples in some of these countries' efforts to

integrate indigenous information in the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.

55. UNFPA continues to support Governments and civil society on the development and implementation of intercultural reproductive health models, programmes and strategies in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, Panama and Viet Nam, among others, supporting joint community-based and government initiatives for building capacities to improve access to culturally sensitive, high quality reproductive health services, addressing the high maternal mortality indicators and equity gaps that prevail among indigenous women in all geographic regions.

56. Support is also provided to programmes that address the dissemination of information on HIV/AIDS, and the prevention of harmful practices among indigenous peoples for which research and evidence-based studies are being carried out. In Bolivia, Guatemala and Panama, UNFPA provides technical assistance to indigenous communities and networks for strengthening access to sexual and reproductive health services.

V. Department of Public Information

57. The Department of Public Information continued to promote and raise global awareness of issues relating to interreligious and intercultural dialogue through its regular coverage of meetings of relevant United Nations bodies, its reporting on the activities of the Organization across the full range of its news and other information outputs, and its support for correspondents wishing to report on United Nations events and intergovernmental conferences.

58. A wide range of developments and issues related to the promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and interreligious and intercultural dialogue received prominent coverage on the United Nations News Centre portal, one of the most heavily visited segments of the United Nations website. Since the adoption of resolution 62/90, some 40 news articles covering those issues were produced by the associated United Nations News Service and distributed to over 50,000 subscribers to its e-mail news alerts service (English and French). Many of those stories were also published on a variety of United Nations system and external websites, among them media outlets, news aggregator websites, NGOs and educational institutions.

59. During the period under review, United Nations Radio produced a number of news stories, features and analytical backgrounders on related events at the United Nations. It also focused on language stories, including a story on using languages to open the window on Eastern and Western cultural exchanges and stories on respecting linguistic diversity. United Nations Television produced a magazine story for *21st Century* on ending Muslim-Christian sectarian violence in Poso, Sulawesi (Indonesia). The segment aired on BBC World and some 50 other channels in early 2008, and was also distributed as a shorter news feature for *United Nations in Action* and *CNN World Report*.

International Day of Non-Violence (2 October 2007)

60. The Department has promoted the first International Day of Non-Violence to the public and media through various information materials. A background press

release in all official languages and a media advisory were produced and disseminated to media at United Nations Headquarters and in the field through the Department of Public Information network of United Nations Information Centres (UNICs). Background information on the principle of non-violence was included on a website created for the Day, together with messages of the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly.

61. These information materials and the message of the Secretary-General for the Day were translated into local languages and circulated to national media by several UNICs, including in Ankara, Asunción, Teheran and Warsaw, and the United Nations Office in Baku. The United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels translated the message of the Secretary-General for the Day into Greek and Portuguese for distribution as a press release, and shared the Portuguese version with UNIC Rio de Janeiro, UNDP offices in Brazil, and United Nations missions in Guinea-Bissau and Timor-Leste.

62. Interviews with national television and radio broadcasters were given on the Day by representatives from UNICs Cairo, Colombo and New Delhi. The Director of UNIC Cairo also gave a number of interviews to print media following a joint celebration of the Day organized with the Embassy of India. A feature article written by a UNIC Dhaka official was published in a Bangladeshi daily newspaper. UNIC Khartoum organized a briefing for journalists on the occasion of the Day.

63. UNICs also worked to promote the Day through special events. UNIC New Delhi participated in a nationally televised multi-faith prayer meeting at which the UNIC Director delivered the message of the Secretary-General for the Day. Representatives of the United Nations Information Service in Vienna attended a ceremony of lights in the city centre to mark the Day and distributed the message of the Secretary-General at the event; UNIC Prague held a press conference, a student conference and a street awareness-raising campaign on the Day; UNIC Dhaka delivered a lecture at a seminar on non-violence at Dhaka University; UNIC Asunción organized an information stand at an exhibition on non-violence; UNIC La Paz held a ceremony to mark the Day in partnership with a national non-violence organization; and a representative from UNIC Kathmandu delivered the message of the Secretary-General at an event organized by the Embassy of India.

Educational outreach

64. As in previous years, the Department of Public Information will organize in 2008 a student conference to mark the International Day of Peace. This event has been successful in raising awareness about the importance of peace and developing a culture of peace among youth worldwide. More than 500 students will be invited to United Nations Headquarters to interact with United Nations Messengers of Peace and students in peacekeeping missions via videoconference to discuss how peace and a culture of peace, or the lack thereof, impact their lives. The event will be webcast, and young people everywhere will be able to send messages of peace to the United Nations Cyberschoolbus website, which devotes part of its website to promoting peace and a culture of peace.

65. Last year, the Department of Public Information organized a three-day symposium in cooperation with the Peace Education Centre, Teachers College (Columbia University), as part of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Institute on Peace Education. This special event drew several

hundred peace educators from around the world and presented an opportunity for the United Nations to share and introduce peace education to the broader international community, including United Nations personnel and affiliated NGOs. Opening remarks were made by the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Holocaust and the United Nations outreach programme

66. General Assembly resolution 60/7 designated 27 January as an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, and requested the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, and to help prevent future acts of genocide. A multifaceted outreach programme has been developed, including seminars, discussion papers drafted by distinguished scholars, briefings, film screenings and innovative online information products for educators.

Unlearning intolerance seminar series

67. These seminars aim to examine manifestations of intolerance and explore means to promote respect and understanding among peoples. As its name suggests, the "Unlearning Intolerance" series offers opportunities to discuss how intolerance, wherever it exists and for whatever reason, can be "unlearned" through education, inclusion and example. Recent seminars have included those on the themes "Critical perspectives in combating genocide", "Cartooning for peace" and "Art changing attitudes towards the environment".

Outreach programme on slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

68. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/122, the Department has developed a diverse multi-platform strategy comprising a series of events beginning with the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, follow-up activities throughout the year and, building on the slave trade project developed by UNESCO, an educational programme for intermediate and high schools that can be used at any time during the school year.

VI. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

69. By its resolution 62/154, the General Assembly affirmed that the Human Rights Council shall promote universal respect for all religious and cultural values and address instances of intolerance, discrimination and incitement of hatred against members of any community or adherents of any religion. By the same resolution, the Assembly took note of the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote and include human rights aspects in educational programmes, particularly the World Programme for Human Rights Education proclaimed by the General Assembly on 10 December 2004. The Assembly called upon the High Commissioner to, inter alia, continue those efforts, focusing on the contributions of cultures, as well as religious and cultural diversity, and to collaborate with other relevant international organizations in holding joint conferences designed to encourage the dialogue among civilizations and promote understanding of the universality of human rights and their implementation at various levels.

70. Information on the activities undertaken by the High Commissioner related to the prevention of defamation of religions, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion is contained in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General to be submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution 62/154.

VII. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

71. The contribution of the Department to intercultural and interreligious dialogue operates at two levels: the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination and the secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the Division for Social Policy and Development.

A. Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination

72. In its resolution 62/90, the General Assembly welcomed the designation of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to play the focal point role in the Secretariat on interreligious and intercultural matters, as mentioned in the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/62/337, para. 27) and in accordance with resolution 61/221. The Office is mandated to interact with United Nations system entities and to coordinate their contribution to the intergovernmental process.

73. The Office has carried out these functions to prepare for the consideration of the General Assembly agenda item devoted to culture of peace and has liaised with all actors concerned to prepare the documentation for the item. It has also provided information on the matter to a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors who have turned to the Office in its capacity as focal point in the Secretariat.

74. The Office was represented at a consultation hosted by the World Council of Churches and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, held at Geneva in January 2008, on a proposed United Nations Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace. It also took part in several meetings of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, including as a speaker on the status of United Nations consideration of this topic, and at inter-agency consultations convened by UNFPA on the work of the United Nations with faith-based organizations.

75. The Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination has carried out these additional functions within the existing budgetary provisions. As no additional resources, particularly human resources, were allocated to carry out the mandate, its activities have necessarily been focused on the tasks foreseen in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 62/90, namely interacting with United Nations system entities and coordinating their contribution to the intergovernmental process.

B. Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

76. The secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues contributes to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue through

servicing the annual sessions of the Forum and other relevant events and work carried out during the year. Indigenous issues are therefore the main substantive area through which the Department of Economic and Social Affairs contributes to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

77. It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous peoples around the world who speak over 4,000 languages (800 in Papua New Guinea, for example). Indigenous peoples are known for their linguistic and other cultural and biological diversity and knowledge of their environment, such as their knowledge of biodiversity, medical and pharmaceutical knowledge, agricultural farming systems and herding of animals, e.g. cattle, reindeer and llamas. Indigenous peoples continue to contribute to the world's cultural diversity and creativity through their visual and performing arts. Development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights are the six mandated areas of the Forum, according to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/22. The pronouncements and recommendations of the Forum on culture permeate its work as a whole. Some of the work that the Forum undertakes or contributes to and that constitutes a contribution to the intercultural dialogue is presented below.

Promotion of the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

78. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007; at least 17 of its 46 articles pertain to culture and contribute to intercultural dialogue. The Declaration is the most comprehensive statement on the human rights of indigenous peoples, at the individual and collective level, and article 42 explicitly mentions the Permanent Forum as a body that "shall promote respect for and full application of the provisions of this Declaration and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration".

Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

79. The General Assembly, by its resolution 59/174, proclaimed the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and, by its resolution 60/142, adopted the Programme of Action for the Decade. The goal of the Decade is the further strengthening of international cooperation for the resolution of problems faced by indigenous people by means of action-oriented programmes and specific projects, increased technical assistance and relevant standard-setting activities. Of the five main objectives of the Decade, all of which contribute to intercultural dialogue, it is worth mentioning two that are particularly relevant to this specific topic: the second objective, "promoting full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lifestyles, traditional lands and territories, their cultural integrity as indigenous peoples with collective rights or any other aspect of their lives, considering the principle of free, prior and informed consent", and the third objective, "redefining development policies that depart from a vision of equity and that are culturally appropriate, including respect for cultural and linguistic diversity of indigenous peoples".

International Day of the World's Indigenous People

80. In 1994, the General Assembly, by its resolution 49/214, decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous People would be observed on 9 August

every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (49/214). The date marks the day of the first meeting, in 1982, of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the Commission on Human Rights. Every year the day is observed at United Nations Headquarters with messages from the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Panel and cultural events are organized and are open to the public.

Promotion of cultural perspectives on development

81. Data collection and disaggregation concerning indigenous peoples have been identified by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as posing unique challenges both in terms of developing data for global comparative purposes and of developing data that is useful at a micro-level for indigenous peoples. In analysing data, the full diversity and demographic profile of indigenous communities should be taken into account, including gender, children, youth and older persons, and people with disabilities. The process of data collection is critical for the empowerment of the communities and for identifying their needs. Indigenous communities should have the right to have data (primary and aggregated) returned to them, for their own use, noting the importance of the confidentiality of such data, particularly as it applies to individuals who have participated in conducting data-collection exercises. The Forum has also been promoting indicators of well-being, poverty and sustainability that respond to the cultural specificities of indigenous peoples.

Methodologies regarding free, prior and informed consent and indigenous peoples

82. The implementation of the principle of free, prior and informed consent has been identified as a major challenge by the Forum. The Forum held a workshop on the topic in 2005, examined the international and domestic instruments and practices relevant to the principle, identified challenges, clarified the content and elements of the principle and made a number of policy recommendations. The implementation of the principle of free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, which is enshrined in various articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, will contribute to the voices of indigenous peoples being heard within the multicultural societies in which they live.

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues special theme for 2010: indigenous peoples' development with culture and identity

83. At its seventh session, the Forum decided that the theme of its ninth session in 2010 would be "Indigenous peoples' development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples".

Focus of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on indigenous languages during the International Year of Languages (2008)

84. In 2008 the Forum held a workshop on the subject and a half-day discussion during its seventh session. Among the main actions recommended were the

following: (a) working towards concrete actions and legislative development aimed at eliminating discrimination against the current use of indigenous languages; (b) developing programmes aimed at promoting the empowerment of indigenous languages through all mediums, including radio and television; (c) supporting and increasing the number of centres for the study of indigenous languages; (d) financing and supporting schemes for special projects that are formulated by indigenous peoples and are focused on revitalization and rescue of threatened languages; (e) designing, in consultation with indigenous peoples and the Forum, the organization of a world conference on linguistic diversity, indigenous languages, identity and education, as a contribution to the programme of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

United Nations Development Group guidelines on indigenous peoples' issues

85. Responding to the objectives of the Programme of Action of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and of the Forum, the United Nations Development Group developed and adopted guidelines on indigenous peoples' issues for the operational activities of the organization at the country level. The guidelines should contribute to the integration of culturally sensitive approaches in the area of development.

VIII. Overview of other regional and international activities on intercultural and interreligious dialogue

86. This section presents important regional and international initiatives aimed at promoting and deepening intercultural and interreligious dialogue. It is not an exhaustive list of such initiatives, and many other interesting activities certainly deserve to be mentioned. However, given the space limitations of a report of this kind, the list is restricted to major initiatives, other than those presented in previous sections of this report, that were undertaken during the period under review, are planned in the near future and were mentioned by Member States during the High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation and Understanding for Peace, held by the General Assembly in October 2007.

87. At United Nations Headquarters, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace has continued to carry out important work. Initiated by the Philippines, the Tripartite Forum is an open-ended consultative partnership among Governments, the United Nations system and civil society that explores practical measures, utilizing interfaith dialogue and cooperation, to promote respect and advance understanding. Involvement in the Tripartite Forum has continued to grow, with 15 United Nations agencies, 53 Governments, and 110 United Nations-accredited faith-based NGOs collaborating with it on development and peace goals. The Tripartite Forum holds regular meetings and invites United Nations and outside experts to present their activities and views.

88. Australia and the European Union hosted a regional youth interfaith forum in Perth, Australia, in December 2007, for youth from 12 countries.

89. The European Parliament and the European Council proclaimed 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue; a wide range of events has been organized by the European Commission, the Member States, the civil society and the media.

90. The fourth Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony was held in Phnom Penh, from 3 to 6 April 2008, gathering together 16 countries of the region.

91. In May 2008, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the member States of the Council of Europe launched the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, which provides various orientations for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding; a European conference on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue took place in San Marino, on 23 and 24 April.

92. The fourth Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Dialogue was co-organized by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and Thailand and hosted by the city of Amsterdam from 3 to 5 June 2008, with the overall theme "Interfaith dialogue in practice: sharing best practices".

93. The World Conference on Dialogue was held in Madrid in July 2008. The Conference, which was the personal initiative of the King of Saudi Arabia, was opened by the King of Saudi Arabia and the King of Spain. The main thrust of the discussions was on the need to promote understanding and tolerance among followers of the world's faiths, and on the dual needs to combat terrorism and propaganda on the "clash of civilizations". More than 200 clerics, academics and experts representing diverse creeds and belief systems from around the world took part in the Conference. Appropriate modalities for a follow-up to the Conference are being finalized.

94. Kazakhstan will conduct an international forum of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Western and Islamic countries, entitled "Common world: progress through diversity", on 17 October 2008, in Astana, and will host in September 2009 the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

95. The Parliament of the World's Religions, which brings together leaders and followers of the world's religious and spiritual communities to discuss peace, diversity and sustainability in the context of interreligious understanding and cooperation, will be held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

96. The Philippines will host the Non-Aligned Movement special ministerial meeting on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace in Manila, in May 2009.

97. Consideration is currently under way in the Russian Federation regarding the establishment of a religious leaders' forum, the main focus of which would be aimed at minimizing the gaps and controversies that exist in the personal and fundamental views of different religions and denominations.

IX. Conclusion

98. **The report reveals the multiplicity of initiatives taken at the international level to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, all of which contribute to the implementation of resolution 62/90. Given the growing number of actors involved in this area of work and the difficulty to reflect in a comprehensive and appropriate manner on new initiatives, the Assembly may wish to focus its future request for reporting on the preparations of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) by the United Nations system and other major international actors.**